Sweet Dust
&
Growling Lambs
Also by Phil Maillard:

*A North American Journal* (Blackweir, Cardiff, 1976)
*Grazing the Octave* (Galloping Dog, Swansea, 1977)
*Quartz: A Winter Book* (Galloping Dog, Swansea, 1979)
*Portraits* (Galloping Dog, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1980)
*Plot 20* (Galloping Dog, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, 1987)
*Coming Up From Silence* (Canna, Cardiff, 1999)
*A Staircase in the Sierra* (c/w *Imágenes* by Val Collett, Canna, Cardiff, 2006)
Sweet Dust
& Growling Lambs

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by

Phil Maillard

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RIGHT UP AGAINST IT

Poems, 1980s
NEW DECADE SONG

Name/a thing/ & you gain a measure/of power
Chris Torrance, ‘Citrinas’

In the north
some slight earth tremors
& here in Wales
a night full of rushing water
We go out in the tongue
of clear Polar air
after the storm
The steep streaming roads
are deep in lines of mud & stones
& black leaf-mulch
White hills
ride the distance
Up around the Forestry
we cross battlefields of smashed trees
where they have been cutting
In the plantations
between the crowded pines
it is gloomy
& lifeless
To name
is not just to gain power
but to set ourselves
within some pattern
some pulse
some shock wave
as the first drops of more rain
prick the puddles
as I align a stone on the Roman road
down a firebreak
& straight to the lights
on the long low shed
of the open-cast at Rhigos
bright
below the dark sweep of the ridge
**Hill Country Contrasts**

We walk down to the river
thinking of the old man—

_We don’t know enough_, he had said,
implying no lack of detail
no lack of information
but a completion
by death.

We had sat in the parlour
aware of time

Time passing
Time passing slowly
	Tick
Tick of
the old clock in the corner.

He’d said goodbye in the garden,
under his copper beech
in his Sunday suit, with a box rule
sticking out the top pocket . . .

We walk down to the river
through the bluebells and orchids—
3 dippers whip downstream—
you bathe, lovely mammal,
dark hair floating, miming
your tingle and chill in water
cold from underground.
Sweet dust
The taste of
sweet dust

I’m an old man
a many-lived man
& in chaos
I come back to London

Something you feel
or you don’t

Walking through a sunny square
like a man who has found his feelings

& the marked faces—
weakness & woe—
remind me
how I’m always looking out for you—
my face too
jarred in the black Tube window
tired with looking

The Pleasure Gardens of Lambeth
The Temple of Flora, The Apollo Gardens, Vauxhall
CONTENTMENT PASSE RICHESSE

Estates abandoned
Dust
Ah, Lambeth!
Topaz Street
Corrugated iron windows
Parliament suddenly
over the river

The Matter of Britain

Growling lambs

SCRAP SUS NOW

A nudge in the back
in the speeding police transit
Fallen on the floor, have we sir?

The cat
does the Lambeth Walk
across the wet concrete
PHANTOMS

Or, *If you want to dream, cut out the picture.*
   *If you want to fly, cut out the coupon.*
   —RAF advert.

   *For Phil Morsman*

I never see jet-fighters now
but think of Phil, the painter,
inscribing their silhouettes
& their mental glint
on mountain & valley,
over cliff & field.

Images of death.
Heirs of first war trench
& plague pit horrors.
Power thrust. Smooth
sex thrust, the naked girl
looking out the window at
the curved shape low over the roof.
Spaceship rescue dreams,
waiting for the aliens
as we did for the barbarians,
some kind of solution.
Fear, & fear-born hopes.

But I am not equipped
to make distinctions.
I have not the technology.
I write of Phantoms.

The truth is simpler
as they unzip the sky
over Wye’s curve at Symond’s Yat
or skim along Eden’s valley,
or as they start up the jackdaws
in the Glen of Mercury
or compete in outline
with cormorants & geese
over the Isles of the Wanderers

or as they do not appear
above the bright furrows of
Phil’s painting The Field In July.
I didn’t put them in,
he said, but when I look
I can hear them.
I can see them.

But I am not equipped
to make distinctions.
I have not the technology.
I write of Phantoms.
AUTUMN SONG

Darkness & Light

Out on the moor
    in the rain
the heather is dark
    & the rushes hold the light
into themselves
      The river turns wild
foam-brown, full, fierce

To re-enact
      my father’s woe

Dogs barking
    at either hand

The corrupt lower Neath
sliding slow & muddy
through the ruins of industry
between damp, dutiful towns,
black wharves & breakers’ yards

The upper Neath, innocent
with a secret knowledge
of innocence, a leaf, dropping
onto the pulsing surface
of the water

A man on a bicycle
leading a horse
through the village
at dusk—sparks
striking off the road
For R.

There are so many of you & each seems blind to the others; you confuse me. But sometimes we ride that simple current between us; & sometimes we kiss in empty rooms. Now & then we even talk to each other! Sarcasm is our best mode of communication. Once, having firmly agreed on the impossibility of it, you suddenly showered my neck with kisses, then pushed me away. Your body said one thing and your mouth another. You said, You don’t understand me— I’m flighty— you’re so serious. I said, smiling, You’re nice, & I meant it— quite simply, I approve of you— and you said, I know! What could I reply to that? What could anyone reply to that? I see your problem but that’s not my meaning. You’re about the least flighty person I’ve ever met, & me, I’m certainly not serious.
What am I trying to say?
That we don’t understand each other
at all? Or that we share more
than you can afford to admit,
with your elaborate defences
& emergency exits.
You’re a person of power
on a difficult, stubborn path;
you’re efficient & calculating,
you’re emotional & physical & demanding & silly,
you’re reactionary & anxious & can’t relax,
you’re running away from yourself,
you’re tied to a stone,
& somewhere
you’re alone & afraid.

I remember you saying
you had no family farther back
than the train across the border
from a small country
that scarcely still exists.
You have no roots
other than centuries of pain.
Despite your Birmingham accent
you’re a refugee,
you’re one of the Boat People.
OK, you’ve got problems;
but don’t force me
to be critical.
Now I’m regarding you
shyly, or with anger—
must it be like this?
When can we
look at each other
& simply
smile?